

## The Quiet in the Land? A conference report

I flew from Edmonton to Toronto and travelled by car with friends from Waterloo, Ont., to Millersville, Pa. We arrived at the "Quiet in the Land?" conference late on Wednesday, June 7. By the following evening most of the 256 participants had arrived to spend four moving and worthwhile days exploring our converging and diverging pasts.

Our journey from Waterloo was the reverse of my Tunker (Brethren in Christ) ancestors, who had left Pennsylvania to settle in southern Ontario some 200 years ago. For my travelling companions, both of Russian Mennonite background, this was the trek of the "other" Mennonites. Whatever our background, we all eagerly anticipated this premier Anabaptist-Mennonite women's history conference.

The Quiet in the Land? conference was primarily an academic conference, but it was also much more. It was a chance to return to my roots. It was also an opportunity to experience living history. Old Order women graced us with their stories on a tour of Amish and Mennonite women entrepreneurs, and others including Hutterites, attended the conference. As women who are the products of the changes in Mennonite history had opportunities to meet with women who represent the continuities in our tradition, the mothers of Mennonite history conversed with younger scholars. As women encountered role models, male participants had the occasion to put their experience in the framework of a feminine and feminist context. As students met with professors of history, academics rubbed shoulders with lay historians. As historians objectively probed their past, poets and artists illuminated it.

The schedule was full. Frequently four or five sessions of three or four papers each ran concurrently. Evenings featured moving poetry readings and powerful dramatic productions. Despite feeling overwhelmed at times, I found the conference to be a wonderful first, an occasion I would never have dreamed of two decades ago when I researched and wrote an undergraduate paper on the history of Brethren



## THE QUIET IN THE LAND? WOMEN OF ANABAPTIST TRADITIONS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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in Christ women. As some observed, "the quiet in the land" may no longer describe Mennonite women and their historians. With this conference report, we are attempting to share with you some of the ways that Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women are breaking the silences of our experiences and our varied histories.

—Lucille Marr, compiler

For the first time an entire conference was held to discuss the experiences of women in Anabaptist and Mennonite traditions. As a person interested in women's history in general, this held tremendous promise for me. More specifically, as an independent scholar working on sixteenth century court records to reconstruct the stories of Anabaptist women, it was exciting for me to participate in this conference.



For the first time the scholars who have been working on this topic for several years were now able to meet each other and discuss issues pertinent to their work. The papers and the discussions that followed fostered new collegial relationships among the presenters and created awareness of our sixteenth-century foremothers among conference participants.

The standing-room-only audience present for the session on sixteenth century Anabaptist women indicated

that participants were interested in hearing about these foremothers of earlier times. Because the beginnings of all "free church" traditions, including all Anabaptist and Mennonite groups as well as the Baptists (who were also represented at the conference) go back to the sixteenth century Reformation, it was indeed appropriate to have a whole session and three additional papers presented in other sessions on this topic.

This conference was a success not just because of its focus on the sixteenth century. The various sessions of the conference highlighted women's education, church and community work, ministerial roles and refugee experiences as well as their struggle with issues of dress in the centuries

following the Reformation. A few of the sessions discussed Christian women in Africa and India. But for the most part, Mennonite women outside North America and North American women of color were not represented at this conference.

At times the range and diversity of themes made it difficult to decide which session to attend. However, all the participants were together for three plenary sessions, one to open the conference Thursday evening, a second one Saturday morning and the third at the close of the conference. The plenaries allowed everyone to consider some basic questions on theory and methodology.

In the opening keynote address, Theresa Murphy discussed women's history and nineteenth century religious developments as they pertained to women. Her lecture was a springboard for Kimberly Schmidt and Steve Reschly to suggest models for Mennonite women's history. In the second plenary, presentations by a Jewish scholar, a historian of Black history and a Mennonite historian brought valuable insight to the question of whether "insiders" or "outsiders" should write the history of a particular group. Important methodologies such as the use of oral interviews were also discussed in this session.

The closing plenary provided feedback from committee members, session leaders and respondents as well as presenters and listeners. Finally, the poets, musicians and dramatists whose presentations complemented those of the historians, sociologists, anthropologists and writers, illustrated that the arts have come into their own as an expression of Mennonite women's experience. What stands out in my mind are the words of a Mennonite woman farmer in Manitoba, quoted in the dramatic performance "Quietly Landed?": "I am quiet but not voiceless."

By the end of the conference it was agreed that whether rich or poor,



**"I am quiet but not voiceless."**

Canadian or European, women in Mennonite and related traditions have expressed themselves in a variety of ways and were not always "quiet." At Millersville, Anabaptist and Mennonite women moved from the periphery of the Mennonite historical narrative to center stage. If these stories will now become and remain part of the larger narrative of Mennonite history, the goals of the planning committee will begin to be realized.

As the reader will note in the following reports, the Millersville conference was a significant event in the lives of those who participated and played a key role in affirming the excellent research and the many good writing projects that are being done about women in Anabaptist and Mennonite traditions and in related groups, such as the Quakers and Moravians. The impact of these four days will surely continue in many ways, at the very least, until the next such conference.

—Linda Huebert Hecht, compiler

**Lucille Marr and Linda Huebert Hecht together compiled this issue of *Report*.**

Lucille Marr is assistant professor of history at Augustana University College in Camrose, Alta. Her Ph.D. is from the University of Waterloo and her research is in women's history and gender issues. She and her husband Jean-Jacques Goulet are the parents of a teenaged son and daughter.

Linda Huebert Hecht is an independent scholar with a master's degree in history. Her research area is Anabaptist women in the sixteenth century Austrian territory of Tirol. She is co-editing a book with Arnold Snyder on sixteenth century Anabaptist women. She and her husband Alfred live in Waterloo, Ont., are members of the Glencairn Mennonite Brethren Church and the parents of two adult children.



## **The digging woman— An image for the Quiet in the Land**

The digging woman and her motto, "Work and Hope," pictured, were featured on t-shirts sold at the Quiet in the Land? conference. This image was inspired by the printer's mark and Latin motto, "Fac et Spera," which appeared on the title pages of the original Dutch editions of *Martyrs Mirror*. When the book was translated into German at Ephrata, Pa., in 1745–48, the printer's device was retained and the motto translated into German. Consequently, a version of the male image has appeared on all subsequent German editions of *Martyrs Mirror* until 1990 and will be restored to the 1996 edition.

When Julia Kasdorf, a poet who had been researching the meaning and origins of the digging man (who symbolizes Adam after the fall; see her article in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, April 1995) and Julie Musselman, a fashion designer, discovered their common interest in the motto, they adapted it. Julie placed the woman onto the Shem Zook (1849) design and playfully called her Anna Baptist. The German motto was translated into English. T-shirts with this image were sold to raise funds for the conference. •

**"We wanted to foster dialogue between scholars of women's history and scholars of the Anabaptist experience."**

by Steven D. Reschly and Kimberly D. Schmidt

## Quietly landing from the planning

After two years of constant work and worry, The Quiet in the Land? conference was over and done in only four days. It seemed out of proportion somehow. Yet, as the days ran by, quite breathlessly at times, it became clear that everything we had talked about and wanted to accomplish was happening before our eyes. As co-chairs of the Coordinating Committee, we are thrilled with the outcome of the conference.

The idea for the Millersville conference began at a 1992 conference on rural and farm women in Davis, Calif. We had exchanged dissertation prospectuses a few years earlier, but had never met in person, and we were both looking for other scholars researching Mennonite and Amish women's history. Kim attended the session where Steve presented a paper, and we began playing the Mennonite Game immediately afterwards, quite successfully as it turned out. We discovered both of us had been Intermenno Trainees at the same farm in Germany! As junior graduate students, we also shared frustration at the lack of previous academic work on Amish and Mennonite women's history available to build on.

From our conversations at Davis, we submitted a panel proposal on Amish women's history for the Elizabethtown Conference on 300 years of Amish history held in the summer of 1993. It was the only panel on the program that discussed gender, and the session was packed. We discovered other like-minded scholars, so we arranged a

mealtime caucus to discuss how to promote Amish and Mennonite women's history. From that discussion emerged a small group committed to organizing a conference. In addition to the two of us, the group included Diane Zimmerman Umble, Beth Graybill, and Virginia Ratigan. Soon after Elizabethtown, we asked Marlene Epp, Pamela Klassen, Julia Kasdorf and Rachel Goossen to join our self-appointed Coordinating Committee.

The Mennonite Historical Committee contributed crucial seed money for travel and planning expenses. The dean at Millersville University offered financial support and encouraged us to hold the conference there. The committee made good use of e-mail and phone as we decided what to name the proposed conference, how to phrase the call for papers, how to raise funds and arrange for publicity, what kind of arts and music component to include, and the thousands of other program and logistical decisions, large and small. Committee members met as they could at several academic and church-related gatherings. The final push fell to Diane Umble, conference coordinator, and her able student assistants, who put together the final program and wore out several telephones from January to June.

Most important, we as co-chairs always seemed to agree on our goals for the conference, as modified and processed in the consensus crucible of the Coordinating Committee. The committee formulated three main goals:

- 1) We wanted an *academic* conference, modeled after the Berkshire Conference on Women's History, which Steve attended in 1990 and Kim in 1993. We wanted to expand the field of women's history among groups in the Anabaptist tradition by providing a forum for the best research being done. Writing and publishing among these groups lags behind other North American rural, ethnic and religious societies. Many of the scholars we knew about were graduate students or junior scholars, not yet visible in the established world of Mennonite historiography, and we hoped to network with and encourage these researchers in their academic work. As one result of the conference, we hope there will be ongoing international exchanges of research findings, theories and resources. (By the way, the next Berkshire conference takes place June 7-9, 1996, at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. See you there!)



**"We wanted to provide a venue for Mennonite scholars to dialogue with Mennonite poets and artists . . ."**

2) We wanted to foster dialogue between scholars of women's history and scholars of the Anabaptist experience. We cast a wide net, seeking to include the entire spectrum of Anabaptist traditions, from plain to modern to urban to international. We also worked very hard to include scholars from the wider world of women's history and women's studies, asking them to provide comment for many of the paper sessions and keynote addresses during the plenary sessions. In our own keynote address the first evening, we attempted to relate Mennonite women's history to a comparative framework of general American women's history, aided by Theresa Murphy of George Washington University. As a beginning point, we used Gerda Lerner's model of "compensatory" and "contribution" modes of women's history,\* followed by social history and gender theory. This framework may guide Anabaptist women's history, and the Anabaptist experience may modify the framework as well.

In the second plenary, Hasia Diner, from the University of Maryland at College Park, reflected on her experiences as a Jewish scholar researching Jewish history as an insider, and researching Irish history as an outsider. Valerie Grim, Indiana University, shared her experiences working in a rural black community as both family-insider and academic-outsider. Diner and Grim provided useful counterpoints to Diane Umble's ruminations about researching Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonite history in her home region of Lancaster County. As Kim is fond of saying, we wanted to get Mennonite scholars out of their Mennonite skins.

3) We wanted to provide a venue for Mennonite scholars to dialogue with Mennonite poets and artists, recognizing their common task of interpreting the human experience. We received many requests from poets and artists who were interested in showcasing their work. The poetry readings, panels and Saturday evening performances enriched the academic setting immeasurably.



We also recognized that not all goals could be met in one conference. Many topics of critical importance in the larger world of women's history were altogether missing. In future meetings, we hope issues such as race, sexual orientation, discourse analysis, masculinity, disability, international relations, and many others will appear in research presentations. These are areas of potential growth in the women's history of Anabaptist-related groups.

In the aftermath of exhaustion and exhilaration, we are very happy with the outcome of our goals and dreams for the conference. With 256 registrants and a rich program of presentations, consisting of 99 women and 16 men, we believe participation was excellent. The campus setting, where we lived and ate together, enabled a great deal of networking and just plain fun. We anticipate productive future gatherings and we are actively working to "pass the torch" to a new generation of conference planners.

**Steven D. Reschly and Kimberly J. Schmidt were co-chairs of the conference Coordinating Committee.**

**Steven D. Reschly** received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Iowa in 1994. His dissertation discusses an Amish community in nineteenth-century Iowa. He is currently assistant professor of history at Northeast Missouri State University.

**Kimberly D. Schmidt** received her Ph.D. in history from Binghamton University in 1995. Her dissertation discusses the work roles of women in two Mennonite communities. She is currently adjunct professor of history at the University of Maryland at College Park.

\*Gerda Lerner, "Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenge," in *Feminist Studies* 3 (Fall 1975), pp. 5-14.

by Janet M. Peifer

## On the fringes in no-woman's land

*For some time the writer has been impressed to write an article in vindication of the sisterhood of the church, thousands of whom, in many churches, with their brilliant talents and zeal for God, are held in bondage by their so-called leaders, and not suffered to pray in the congregation, neither to speak of what Jesus has done for their souls, neither to exhort or preach. Of such we would inquire, in the language of the apostle, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto men more than unto God" (Acts 4:19). The position we have taken in this communication is, in our opinion so clearly set forth in the Bible as to convince the most skeptical men and women, that God approves of women declaring the story of the cross, as well as men, so that he that readeth may understand.*

Thus ended an article written by John Fohl and published in the *Evangelical Visitor* in September, 1893. Did the influence of such thinking set the parameters for the Brethren in Christ Church to heed Rhoda E. Lee's wake-up call to the denomination of its responsibility to initiate a foreign mission program? When her first appeal in the 1894 General Conference was debated, she wrote an article in which she said: "We hear a great deal of talk about obedience now, but most of us simmer it down to obeying a few church rules and keeping the ordinances, with an occasional testimony in meeting, and expect a blessing; while the great commands, to 'go into all the world and preach the Gospel,' to be self-denying, and to 'give freely,' pass, for the most part, unheeded" (*Evangelical Visitor*, June 1, 1894).

In 1895, Lee read a second paper at the General Conference in which, as stated by Carlton Wittlinger, she "probed mercilessly into the conscience and lethargy of the church" (*Notes and Queries in Brethren in Christ History*, July, 1961). In her paper she confronted the church for shedding a few tears about mission needs and appeasing their consciences "by stepping into some other church and dropping a few cents into the foreign missionary collection, and declining again into carelessness" (*Notes and Queries*, July 1961). Near the end of her paper she wrote:

"In some localities in our country the words River Brethren



" . . . that God approves of women declaring the story of the cross, as well as men . . . "

are but another name for prosperity, and I speak it to our shame that in the 190 years of our church's existence she has never sent a foreign missionary to the field. It is a marvel to many that a church professing separation and whose members possess such a large amount of property has not done so" (*Notes and Queries in Brethren in Christ History*, July 1961).

In 1987 when I discovered these gems and others while doing research in the archives at Messiah College, I grieved for all the young girls and women who, like me, had been denied entrance into pastoral ministry because they were female. Prior to that research, I learned from Janette Hassey's writing that "rich literature circulated at the turn of the century, written from an Evangelical perspective (with its high view of Scripture), that exegeted texts and found the Bible to support, rather than forbid, women's public ministry" (*No Time for Silence*, Academie Books, 1986, p.120).

I began my research with no expectations of finding that the Brethren in Christ had written and published articles and scriptural interpretations which sought to free women from the bondage that traditionally kept them from actively responding to a call to ministry. My discovery produced feelings which span the emotional gamut. One must ask what has happened in the last 100 years that could make today's entrance and acceptance of Brethren in Christ women into pastoral ministry so infrequent and difficult?

There are numerous factors that have allowed the "freeing" interpretations of scripture to be the best kept secret in the late twentieth century, and which have kept women from hearing and following their call to ministry. Hassey states that "as material containing biblical exegesis which opened the way for women in public ministry went out of print, little or no effort was made to replace it. As churches became increasingly routinized and formalized, women found themselves excluded from opportunities for ministry in the church" (*No Time for Silence*, pp.140-142).

In the Brethren in Christ Church, as Lucille Marr noted in her mid-1970's paper entitled "Women in the Brethren in Christ Church in Historical Perspective," the impact of the Wesleyan Holiness movement allowed for greater involvement on the part of women, especially in the revivalist stream. Yet conversely, as the holiness doctrine became legislated, women's freedom to participate in church structures was limited and more narrowly defined (*Evangelical Visitor*, Sept. 25, 1975). Others point to the

**"One must ask what has happened in the last 100 years that could make today's entrance and acceptance of Brethren in Christ women into pastoral ministry so infrequent and difficult?"**

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1920s fundamentalist movement as a factor in the decrease of women who were permitted to use their gifts in preaching and other public ministry.

While there may be less than godly motives among Christians today who disallow the acceptance of women into pastoral ministry, I believe that Christians, for the most part, are making a genuine effort to be true to the scriptures. Those scriptures, especially Saint Paul's, which forbade women to pray and prophesy in the public meetings, are frequently taken as prescriptive injunctions for all times and cultures. It was out of such a mind-set 20 years ago when others told me that I had a pastor's heart and should be a pastor, that I responded, "I don't believe the scriptures allow for women to be pastors." However, when my call to pastoral ministry refused to relent, I entered a persistent search to find for myself what the scriptures said and meant. I, too, was motivated by a deep longing to be true to the scriptures. At age 43, after four years of study to earn my bachelor's degree in religion and biblical studies, I emerged confident that an active response to my call to ministry was not in opposition to the biblical text.

Though the Brethren in Christ Church succumbed to silence between 1920 and 1970 on the matter of women in ministry, the decades of the 1970s and 1980s brought a revival of interest. Articles were printed, study papers were written and presented, a newsletter entitled *Network* (later called *The Alabaster Jar*) was published, a grassroots forum was held at the 1980 General Conference on the matter of women in church leadership, a Committee on Women and Pastoral Ministry was formed with reports and recommendations given at the 1980 and 1982 General Conferences. In the 1982 General Conference, an unprecedented affirmation of women was passed. The recommendation affirmed the ministry of women, called for the paper on the theology of women in pastoral ministry to be circulated at large, and authorized the matter of women in ministry for continued study and discussion.

During my 1987 research when I discovered the action which had taken place in 1982, I wondered what progress had been made in the intervening five years. Soon thereafter, a conference on women in ministry was planned by men and women of the denomination and held in March 1990. Happily, women are being licensed and ordained to pastoral ministry and are serving as youth ministers, ministers of Christian education, and as assistant pastors in multi-staffed churches. Not yet, however, has a woman been called to serve as a senior pastor in an existing congregation. While we have made a wise move in having the General

Conference sanction the training and ordaining of women, the local church boards do the hiring of the pastors. When little is done to educate pastors and subsequently parishioners concerning the theological basis for the General Conference action, there may never be enough pastoral positions available to the called, gifted and trained Brethren in Christ women in churches of their own denomination.

Women called to ministry often find themselves on the fringes searching for a place in the heretofore no-woman's land of pastoral ministry. My own journey has taken a circuitous route. I was raised and baptized in the Lancaster (Pa.) Mennonite Conference. Providentially, my husband and I were led to the Refton Brethren in Christ congregation where my call to ministry had opportunity to develop as a lay leader, and where many years later I was ordained to the ministry and served on the pastoral staff. When I was ready for a fulltime pastoral position, either on a multiple staff or as a senior pastor, none seemed available in the Brethren in Christ denomination. Consequently, I was hired by a retirement community of my Mennonite roots and began full-time as a chaplain (in a conference which does not ordain women). I could be accepted and serve in that facility as an ordained woman because I was of another denomination.

I am grateful for all the opportunities I have had to serve the Lord in lay and pastoral ministries. I believe that no experience is insignificant when answering a call to ministry. My prayer is that God will bless us with a revival of openness to the women in our churches whom God is calling. This would then allow them to move from the fringes to the center of pastoral service, offering them validation to practice the pastoral ministry to which they have been called.

**Janet Peifer presented the paper, "Prophesies and Preaching: Women's Leadership in the Brethren in Christ Church, 1887-1970," at the conference. She is married to Elvin Peifer, is mother of two adult children, and served in lay and pastoral ministry at the Refton Brethren in Christ Church for 25 years. She is in chaplaincy at Landis Homes Retirement Community in Lititz, Pa. She is a graduate of Messiah College and of Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary. She is currently working on an M.Div. degree at Lancaster Theological Seminary.**

by Melanie Cameron

## Poetry and drama at the Millersville conference

*You keep calling me Peter Egger's one-eyed sister, but I do have a name; I am Anna Egger. Yes, I do have a handicap and I never did marry, but they still needed me to help with the preaching and baptizing in the Tirol region. You [the political authorities] saw me as a dangerous threat. You said it showed the standards were really low when women were allowed to shape religious thought. You said my crime was of the worst sort and represented what you feared most; that many women and young and simple-minded persons were being persuaded by wandering agitators to accept Anabaptist ideas. You can arrest me but my brother had nothing to do with this. Leave him alone.*

—Excerpt from script of "Quietly Landed?"

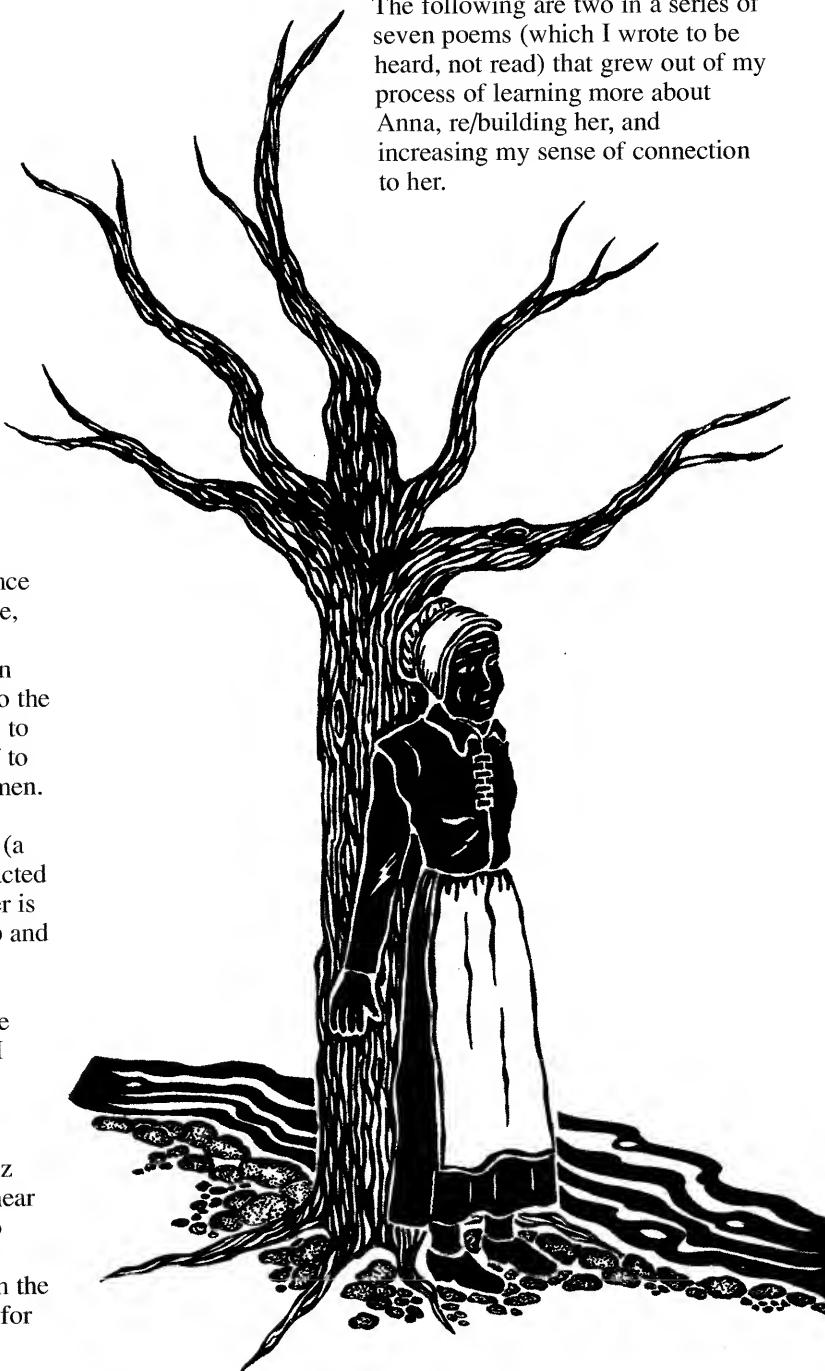
Organizers devoted a significant portion of this conference to poetry, drama, music, dance and the visual arts. To me, the arts provide a unique opportunity to develop—both literally and symbolically—aspects of character, emotion and event, and to place oneself directly in relationship to the subject. And so, I especially valued seeing and listening to artists share their work, and having the privilege myself to act as a vehicle to communicate the voices of other women.

As cast members for the production "Quietly Landed?" (a drama comprised of music, poetry and prose), we interacted with the stories of many Anabaptist women. Anna Egger is one of the "characters" I had the opportunity to develop and stage.

Anna Egger lived in the Austrian territory of Tirol in the 1500s. We know little about her aside from that which I mention at the beginning of the first poem. In the Austrian court records her name is mentioned twice. A report of April 1528 stated that Peter Egger, his "one-eyed" (cross-eyed) sister Anna and a man named Lorenz Aufleger were preaching and baptizing in the villages near the Mieminger mountain. Local authorities were told to search for these three Anabaptists and capture them. References to Anabaptist women as baptizers are rare in the historical records. In Anna Egger's case we cannot say for

certain that Anna baptized others, but the court records seem to infer that. A second and final reference to Anna Egger in August 1531 states that Anna fled in the company of her brother and other members of his family.\*

The following are two in a series of seven poems (which I wrote to be heard, not read) that grew out of my process of learning more about Anna, re/building her, and increasing my sense of connection to her.



\* The information from the Austrian court records was given to me by Linda Huebert Hecht.

"To me, the arts provide a unique opportunity to develop—both literally and symbolically—aspects of character, emotion and event, and to place oneself directly in relationship to the subject."

## Anna Egger Poems

I

Anna Egger, you  
are several lines  
in an old register  
in an archive.

You are Peter the Baker's one-eyed sister.  
You are in-law to Cristine, aunt to their children.  
You travelled with Peter and another man.  
And you had no man of your own.

Anna, I close my eyes  
to find  
your life, parts of you  
they didn't write down.

Close my eyes,  
find  
  
your stream,  
my hands in water  
you waded through.  
Wets my sleeves  
like the dampened hem of your dress.

Brush my fingers through your grass,  
find the stone  
you would have found  
if they hadn't dragged you away.  
Pick it up, throw it for you.

I find your tree, Anna,  
touch its bark,  
look up into branches,  
memorize roots.  
Hear ravens, calling you.

Anna, I feel the trunk, sturdy  
as your back,  
the day you stood facing them  
when they came to tell  
what you'd done.  
Oh Anna, one day I brought back  
a piece of her hair,  
long and golden, hair of the woman  
you baptized last,  
left hand on her coarse-clothed shoulder,  
toes in sand of your stream-bed.

II

Anna, I know what they did to you  
that day they came and found you there,  
bare-foot, journal in your pocket,  
one-eyed sister, Anna,  
leaning against your tree.  
I know how you rose stiff, wiped your hands on your dress,  
how your fingers left the bark  
as you stood,  
how they shouted, pushed you  
back to the ground.  
Smaller stones stuck  
in your right knee.  
Anna, remember the sky  
as they slapped you,  
a blue blur as your head whipped down.  
Remember the knuckles and boots,  
the kicking your side, your wet face  
when you stared up  
from hands and knees,  
your words didn't stop,  
your belief in what you'd done,  
in the entries in your journal,  
in the baptizing, the water,  
the hair and shoulders.  
Anna, I know how the grass  
and blood smelled  
on your hands.  
I knelt with you there,  
and we remember together,  
Anna.

Melanie Cameron is a recent graduate of the University of Waterloo in Ontario where she completed a degree in English (rhetoric and professional writing), with a minor in peace and conflict studies. She is pursuing her interest in writing while at the same time working at the Provident Bookstore in Waterloo and as a youth worker at the Stirling Ave. Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ont.

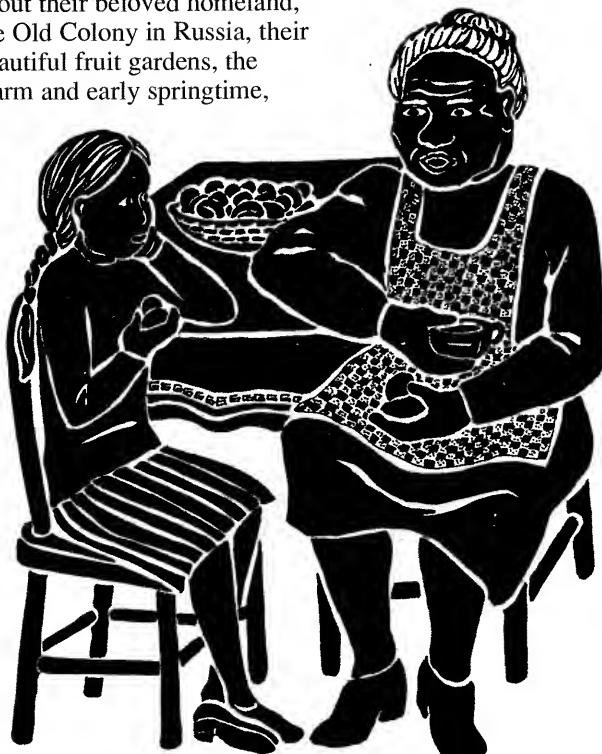
**"As the eldest child of an immigrant family, I also listened, *a lot*. My mother always chastised me for being *nieschierig*, [nosy in Low German] but these were the beginnings of my Mennonite history lessons."**

by Katy Thiessen

## Women of Russian-Mennonite heritage

The excitement began one ordinary Tuesday morning in early May as I opened the envelope containing The Quiet In The Land? conference program. My eyes raced over all the fascinating session topics and my excitement grew. Could I possibly be a part of this first-ever historical conference on Anabaptist women? I am not a historian, a poet, a musician or a writer; I'm an accountant! But I am a woman, a Mennonite woman, a Mennonite woman of Russian-Mennonite heritage who emigrated to Canada with my parents after World War II in 1948 from Germany—and I have never been quiet! My primary school report cards can attest to that; they all say "Katy talks too much."

As the eldest child of an immigrant family, I also listened, *a lot*. My mother always chastised me for being *nieschierig*, [nosy in Low German] but these were the beginnings of my Mennonite history lessons. After all, what did struggling Mennonite families do on Sunday afternoons? They gathered together for Faspa [a cold supper] and talked about their beloved homeland, the Old Colony in Russia, their beautiful fruit gardens, the warm and early springtime,



the terrible war years, the Trek, the camps, the family and friends that were sent back to Russia, the relatives that had disappeared and on and on. That was my history class, and a scary one for a small child. I can still hear them talking in hushed voices about *de Russe* [the Russians] who would come at night and take the men away. They took my grandfather away. For a long time I imagined that the dark clouds at night must be *de Russe*. The dark shapes must somehow swoop down and snatch the men away.

Throughout my childhood these stories were told over and over, and always I was fascinated. They defined who I was and where I came from. Mennonite history helped me to understand tensions and conflicts between my parents. During my adolescent years especially, my relationship with my mother was often hostile and bitter. How could I see that she was frightened and lonely? I only saw anger. How could I know about her terrifying experiences as a young girl during the war, on a wagon with her elderly mother and her older sister who had six little children (and was pregnant with her seventh), on the trek out of Russia—hunger, cold and fear always with them.

At last the war was over, and Germany seemed to be a haven for a brief while. Uncertainty and turmoil affected everyone and often decisions were made hastily and sometimes unwisely. And so a hasty marriage was arranged and a pregnancy soon followed. Soon there were two babies and the urgency to leave Europe resulted in the traumatic separation of my mother from her family. She did not want to go to Canada—she, who had been the pampered youngest child of a prosperous Mennonite family. She never saw her mother again!

Like many of the poor immigrant women, my mother became a martyr to her husband and many children. She buried her grief in endless hours of household labor. It was her penance. My mother needs to tell *her* story.

This conference has been tremendously reaffirming for me as a Mennonite woman in the context of Mennonite history, a history that has long been my therapist. Listening to all the stories, the poetry, the drama and the many papers presented, I felt at home there among all of you. You were telling *my* story.

**Katy Thiessen is an active member of the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba as a board member of Eden Mental Health Services, and as a member of the Douglas Mennonite Church. She and her husband, Henry, live in Winnipeg and are the parents of four grown children.**

By Katie Funk Wiebe

## Reflections

DUKE: "And what's her history?"

VIOLA: "A blank, my lord." (*Shakespeare's Twelfth Night*)

Though Anabaptist women's history may have been a blank at one time, that situation is rapidly changing. That blank is being filled in gradually by scholars such as those who presented papers at The Quiet in the Land? conference.

I have been involved with women's concerns for more than 30 years. At first it was a lonely journey. Then, in 1974, I attended the first Evangelical Women's Caucus, held in Washington, D.C.. The gathering, a first for the evangelical community, was basically a time of finding one another. Of the 300 women present, about 30 were from Mennonite denominations. (The late Herta Funk, a vigorous Mennonite women's leader, called us together. I wish she could have been at this Millersville conference to see what has happened since.)

Later, I became a member of the MCC Women's Task Force, helped with the *Women's Task Force Report* (now *Women's Concerns Report*). Women yearned to find a legitimate place in ministry. The next step was the first Women in Ministry Conference in Elkhart, followed several years later by the first Women Doing Theology Conference in Kitchener. All these conferences were overtly political acts as they brought women of the Mennonite community together. All were necessary to give the women identity and support and to make this Millersville conference possible.

What has been accomplished since those 30 Mennonite women caucused in Washington? I recall clearly the pain, anger, frustration present in those women, their hesitancy at "coming out," or identifying themselves as Christian feminists. I recall, in particular, their tears of relief at knowing they were neither crazy, nor alone, in believing God had a place for them.

So I came to the Quiet conference with a lot of historical baggage. I found this gathering to be a calmer, gentler group than at the Kitchener theology conference. Traces of anger remain, but it is a more controlled anger. Threats to leave the church are less vociferous.

Most comforting to me at Millersville was the presence of women who once felt exiled from the Mennonite community and were "circling back," as well as those who had remained steady and loyal despite difficulties. What a joy to hear from women who had deliberately chosen membership in the Mennonite community because of its spiritual strengths. Another name for the conference might have been "Coming Home."

For me the conference was affirming, enriching, upbuilding. I will never again doubt whether women's roles in the Mennonite community will return to what they once were. I saw too many schooled, skilled, assertive women, rooted in the faith and the Mennonite church. They had picked up the challenge to keep moving. The earlier consciousness-raising events, the appeal to biblical studies, the unfamiliar groping with theological issues, were all necessary for a filling-in-the-blank conference to take place.

### Other Strengths

- Networking took place between women of various branches of the Mennonite constituency, but also with women of other traditions, including Catholic, Jewish, Moravian and Baptists. We learned that wisdom, knowledge and goodness resides in other groups. They have something to say to us; we have something to learn from them.
- It was a good place for women on their way back into the Mennonite community to regroup without judgment.
- We heard topics related to Mennonite women discussed in public for the first time.
- We heard from the large number of creative women, some of whom are recognized far beyond our circles.



**"What a joy to hear from women who had deliberately chosen membership in the Mennonite community because of its spiritual strengths."**

**"It was a good place for women on their way back into the Mennonite community to regroup without judgment."**

## Questions

Yes, we're on our way to filling in the blanks, but we still have a way to go. I found myself asking:

- Why all these women's conferences? What are we trying to accomplish beyond setting the historical record straight? There can be only one reason and that is to strengthen the community and its members in their relationship to Christ and kingdom work. I see all these conferences as much more than academic exercises about a group with strong ethnic characteristics. Anabaptism is first of all the body of Christ with unique distinctives that have shaped us. Too much is at stake if we research mostly cultural traits. I missed research regarding women's religious life and spiritual development other than the martyr period. I wanted to know how Anabaptist faith differs from evangelicalism, from mainstream Protestantism. The history of Anabaptist women is missing with regard to women in pastoral work, in church leadership, deaconess work, missionary service. The field yet to be researched is vast.
- This was an academic conference, and it felt good to be together with other academicians, but what about the women who are not scholars? Who will fill in the blanks in the story of women whose church life is centered in other concerns? What about international women whose culture doesn't parallel that of Pennsylvania Mennonites or Russian Mennonites? Are we big enough to fit them in?
- The time has come to openly identify what we are for, rather than mostly what we are against (patriarchy in church and family structures, domestic violence, dress codes and ethics applicable only to women, etc.).

Can we find courage to speak prophetically, to challenge without destroying, to build bridges?

- I hope the organizers of future conferences will not fall into the pattern of some academic conferences, which seem to have the goal of getting many papers read in a short time, forcing presenters to spout jargon at breakneck speed in a

monotone voice. I was pleased that some presenters were personal and chose to communicate their findings rather than merely read a paper. A few confessed to using the first person for the first time in an academic paper.

- If Mennonite history had been written to include women, how different would it be? History has usually been based on research into official records of boards, conferences, correspondence, memoirs and journals of male leaders. What were women thinking when men in Russia joined the Selbstschutz? What were women's opinions when some of the big decisions, to migrate, for example, were made? What if the official record included diaries, journals, letters of the underside of history—its women?

## Lasting impressions

- The irony of the fact of Miriam Weaver's simple account in the "Quietly Landed?" performance, telling how her family had to give up their piano because of new church regulations forbidding leaders to own one, being part of this masterful musical composed by her daughter, Carol Ann Weaver.
- Julie Musselman's enthusiasm for "more-with-less" clothing that conforms neither to the world nor oppressive Mennonite dress codes.
- Hearing mothers in the restroom discussing their daughters' graduate studies—or their own.
- Gloria Neufeld Redekop's tears while reading an academic paper about war and revolution.
- And who will forget Johnna Schmidt's energetic dramatic performance about coming home, "Prayers for Girls"?
- These events also need to be remembered to fill in the blanks in women's history.

**Katie Funk Wiebe is professor emeritus of Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kan., and the author of numerous books, the latest being *Border Crossing* (Herald Press, 1995). She is a member of the First Mennonite Brethren Church in Wichita.**



by Marion Kobelt-Groch

(Translated from German to English by Linda Huebert Hecht)

## "What has stayed with you"

In 1990 Christa Wolf published an account entitled "What has stayed with you." These words come to mind when I think about the conference in Millersville. I remember many things, very many. The feeling of having had an unforgettable experience is intertwined with the fascination of the new. For one thing, to have been in North America is an event of lasting value. Moreover, the somewhat different American life style held me spellbound.

Following an adventurous taxi ride from the airport, I sat for half an hour in the magnificent train station in Philadelphia, a place that made me forget all the other railway stations I had ever seen. This remains in my memory as clearly as my desperate attempt to use the telephone at the hotel to call home to Germany. Thanks to a friendly woman at the reception desk, I was finally able to achieve the latter. Together, as directed by the operator, we fed the money hungry machine a whole roll of quarters. Then the connection was finally made. I will always remember the relaxed and cooperative manner which I encountered again and again, as typical of North America. People are ready to help, to overcome language barriers and to give guidance, making the new situation as simple as possible for the stranger.

At the conference itself a spirit of peaceful togetherness pervaded. Since the overwhelming number of participants were Mennonite, in some respects the gathering seemed more like a family conference. Still, those outside the family were not made to feel like outsiders. The many friendly encounters and conversations showed that questions related to Anabaptist and Mennonite women are a common research task. The interdisciplinary program left no doubt that there was much to be said about the oft forgotten or quietly ignored sisters of the faith. In fact, there were too many lectures to choose from, often leaving one with the feeling that something had been missed.

I will mention a few aspects of the many presentations offered. There were presentations for those interested in feminine spirituality among the Moravian Brethren, the problems of gender specific dress, Anabaptist women of the sixteenth century, women in authoritative positions, and Amish women in Lancaster County. There were sessions about women in wartime, revolution or migration, including a presentation by Marlene Epp on Mennonite women in the "green hell" of Paraguay, about the feminine in Mennonite art, and on sexuality and power.

Some themes were familiar while others were completely new. Autobiographies, diaries and also conversations, like the one Leonard Gross had with Elizabeth Horsch Bender, allowed for glimpses of individual female thought and behavior patterns. For me personally it was significant to learn more about my own area of research, the Anabaptist women of the sixteenth century and to exchange information with those interested in this topic.



“... allowed for glimpses of individual female thought and behavior patterns.”



In addition to the academic, art and culture were not short changed. I was fascinated by Johanna Schmidt's self-written individual scenes called “Prayers for Girls: a Meditation on Red and Blue.” The piece dealt with the search (which fortunately ended in success) of a young woman for an individual identity amid the tension of Mennonite tradition and the world. I also well remember that small exhibition devoted to the Amish folk artists Henry Lapp (1862–1904) and Barbara Ebersol (1846–1922). Barbara's work was viewed in the context of an excursion organized for conference participants into the Amish countryside. I would not have wanted to miss this trip, although the tourist-oriented commercialization of Amish art and imitations of it repelled more than it attracted. I was not less astonished by Rebecca Huyard, the self-assured, articulate Amish woman, who welcomed us into her home; she did not fit the picture of Amish women that I had in my mind.

With two American style cotton blankets, Levi jeans and various books in my luggage I returned home. What has stayed with me? Memories of an interesting conference in a country that hopefully I will visit again soon.

**Marion Kobelt-Groch** received a doctorate in 1991 from the University of Hamburg where she is presently a lecturer. Her dissertation on sixteenth century Anabaptist women (written in German) was published in 1993. One of her several articles dealing with Anabaptist women from the Reformation time period was translated and published in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. She is on the editorial board of the journal *Mennonitischen Geschichtsblätter*, published in Germany. She lives in Timmendorfer Strand with her husband and young child.

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#### Book review

## Three books on Mennonite/Amish women

*A Mennonite Woman's Life*, photographs by Ruth Hershey, text by Phyllis Pellman Good (Good Books, Intercourse, Pa., 1993, 91 pages); *Amish Women* by Louise Stoltzfus (Good Books, 1994, 123 pages); *Growing Up Plain* by Shirley Kurtz (Good Books, 1994, 63 pages).

These three books, written by and about women of eastern Pennsylvania, span a century. A common motif is how women have found unique ways for personal expression in the midst of a church community that identifies clear boundaries for them. Each book can be read easily in one sitting and each one gives an inside view of the lives of Amish and Mennonite women. They can be read for personal enjoyment or group discussion.

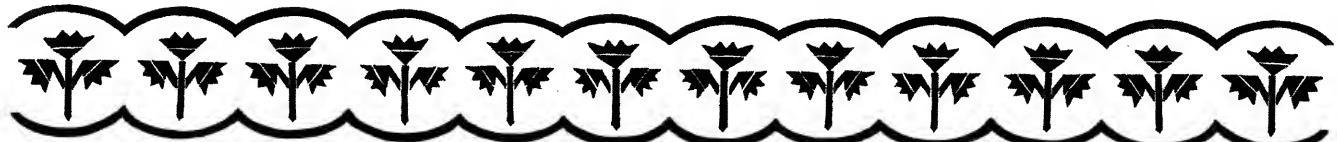
*A Mennonite Woman's Life* provides us with a rare glimpse of rural life in Lancaster, Pa., through the box camera lens of Ruth Hershey (1895–1990). The book displays 50 striking, black and white pictures that Ruth photographed and developed from 1915 to 1940. The negatives lay forgotten in a small box until Ruth's grandson Ed Huddle recently printed them. His selection of her photographs and Phyllis Pellman Good's descriptive narrative form a rich biographical sketch of this remarkable Mennonite farm woman. Ruth Hershey respected her church and conformed to its expectations, while finding acceptable ways to satisfy her quest for new experiences. At a time when women primarily pursued household tasks, Ruth played the organ, read Dickens and Shakespeare, drove a car, and studied practical nursing. She capably managed the demanding work of raising five children and farming with her husband, Willis. She also found a good balance between work and leisure. Ruth's eyes were keen for a good shot whether posed or spontaneous. Her pictures preserve scenes of men pausing from their work of butchering a pig and hauling hay, of children at play with farm pets, of the family at work and

at rest, of visitors in the Hershey farm, of trips away from home, of Sunday afternoon gatherings and lightening in the sky. Fortunately, the book includes pictures of Ruth herself.

In a quest to better understand her own background growing up in an Amish home, Louise Stoltzfus has written a warm and wistful account, *Amish Women, Lives and Stories*. The author collected stories from personal childhood memories and from interviews with ordinary Amish women in their homes. Since most of the women are family or personal friends of the author, they speak with candor about their experiences and hopes. Their foundation for life is family, faith and church. Daily routines are the usual activities—women cooking, gardening, sewing, quilting, caring for children and family and visiting. But there are surprises in this book for any reader who holds a stereotypic view of Amish people. The creative energy of these women leads them into unexpected roles. Following the death of two children, Esther counsels grieving families and writes a book. At midlife Katie and her husband move several hours away from their family and community to enjoy the mountains and start a small business. Rebecca works as a medical assistant at a genetics clinic. Susie, an artist and painter, combines her art with parenting and farming.

In *Growing Up Plain*, Shirley Kurtz revisits adolescence, recalling her feelings and experiences as a plain Mennonite teenager growing up in the sixties. She uses family and school photographs along with text to create a brief, whimsical memoir. The writing is frank and informal with humorous memories of herself and others. (Might some of her friends wince?) Vivid detail invites readers to feel with Shirley and remember their own struggles through adolescent years. How does it feel to be different from your surrounding community? How does it feel to be “plainer than” your Mennonite peers? Church prescribed codes for dress and activities add an extra layer of strain to the usual uncertainties that teenagers manage. But, there is plenty here to show that spontaneous teenage behavior is not squelched by codes. Growing up plain with many rules to follow is surely better than growing up with no boundaries at all.

Reviewed by Susan Godshall of Mount Joy, Pa. She and her husband just began an Eastern Mennonite Missions assignment in Tanzania.



#### Book review

## Helpful devotions in times of depression

***When It Hurts To Live: Devotions For Difficult Times,***  
Kathleen Kern, (Faith and Life Press, Newton, KS, 1994,  
208 pages)

*When It Hurts To Live* is an honest, realistic and helpful book of 40 devotional readings. Kathleen Kerns shows great courage in writing this book based on her personal experiences with major depression. She directly faces the many spiritual and psychological issues that surface when a Christian is in the depths that result from depression. At the same time, she is able to clearly utilize her faith system and Bible references to both comfort and challenge the depressed person.

Kathleen refuses to give easy answers to the many questions about God, faith and self-worth that arise out of depression, but rather acknowledges the confusion, difficulty and importance of struggling with these very questions. She describes the doubts that the depressed person feels, doubts that arise from within as well as from other well-meaning Christians. She related these many doubts to biblical events in a way that demonstrates that God doesn't offer easy answers, but rather chooses to be Emmanuel, God with us, as He walks with us through our struggles.

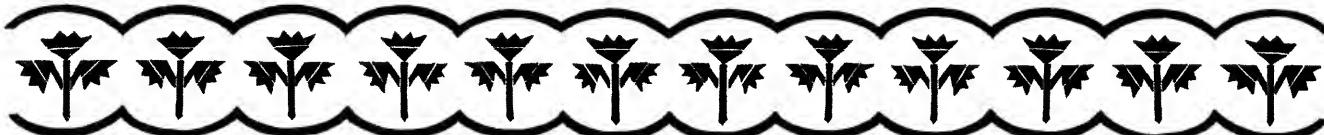
Kathleen has managed to balance spiritual help with psychological help. She offers support for seeking professional help in the forms of counseling, medication and hospitalization as viable and important resources for Christians. Through her own disclosure, she witnesses to the fact that these interventions work. At the same time, she acknowledges the difficulty that seeking help from outside the church community can cause to both the depressed person and others within the church.

*When It Hurts To Live* is very readable, with large print and short chapters averaging five pages each. Each devotion contains a brief Bible passage, some reflections on the passage, suggestions for ways to apply the topic, questions for reflection, and a brief prayer. Depressed persons, who often have difficulty concentrating and reading for long periods of time, would find each chapter manageable. The reader can pick and choose topics, based on their particular needs, or can read the book straight through.

This book is suitable for individual use, but could also be used as a springboard for a support group. It is not only helpful to persons suffering from depression, but for all persons who struggle with questions regarding pain and suffering in the Christian's life. Pastors and other care-givers within the church would grow in understanding and empathy for hurting people by reading this book.

I wish Kathleen's book had been available to me when I suffered from a major depression. As a clinical mental health counselor, and a person who has lived with depression, I highly recommend this book.

—Reviewed by Anne Findlay-Chamberlain, Hershey, Pa.



## Women in ministry

*Edna Dyck* was licensed for ministry at Shalom Mennonite Church, Newton, Kans., Aug. 20.

*Gladys and Simon Mungai* are pastors at Morning Star Mennonite Church in Muncie, Ind.

## New publications

*Expanding the Circle of Caring: Ministering to family members of survivors and perpetrators of sexual abuse* is a new 88-page booklet produced by MCC Women's Concerns. Contains stories by family members, addresses their needs, and talks about how the church can more effectively minister to them. Cost is \$5 U.S./\$7 Cdn. Order from MCC U.S. or MCC Canada Women's Concerns.

*Let's Make a Garden* by Tamara Awad Lobe, Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pa., 1995. This picture story book for ages 4-8 and up offers a vision of children from around the world planting a garden together in peaceful cooperation. The author illustrated the book with colorful torn-paper art.

*Amish Folk Artist Barbara Ebersol: Her Life, Fraktur and Death Record Book* by David Luthy, is a collection of the art of Barbara Ebersol and a record of her life. Published by Lancaster (Pa.) Mennonite Historical Society, 717-393-9745.

*Meditations for Moms-to-Be* by Sandra Drescher-Lehman, Good Books, Intercourse, Pa., 1995. Just over 270 short daily meditations for expecting mothers. By the author of *Meditations for New Moms*.

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## ANABAPTIST WOMEN DOING THEOLOGY

May 9-11, 1996  
Canadian Mennonite Bible College  
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Sponsored by:  
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MCC Canada

Conference Topics:  
Session I: Exploring an Anabaptist Feminist Hermeneutic  
Session II: Anger & an Anabaptist Feminist Hermeneutic  
Session III: God Image & an Anabaptist Feminist Hermeneutic  
Session IV: Community & an Anabaptist Feminist Hermeneutic

*This conference follows in the tradition and rich experience of the 1992 & 1994 Women Doing Theology conferences. It has been planned to create a "multi-layered conversation." Each paper will have two verbal respondents from a variety of fields. A third non-verbal response will be given by women artists. Times of worship, discussion and workshops will add further layers to the experience.*

For further information contact: Wendy Kroeker or Kathleen Hull  
Mennonite Central Committee Canada. Phone (204) 261-6381

**Betta and Marlin Kym** are assistant pastor and pastor at Bellwood Mennonite Church, Milford, Neb.

**Vicki Penner** is assistant pastor and minister of youth at First Mennonite Church in Hutchinson, Kan.

**June Thomsen** is minister of youth and Christian education at Grace Mennonite Church, Pandora, Ohio. Ruth Boehm is associate pastor at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg.

**Ruth Boehm** is associate pastor at Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg.

**Jeni Hiett Umble** is on the leadership team at Southside Fellowship, Elkhart, Ind.

**Dorothy Jean Weaver** was ordained for special ministries as a teacher of church leaders at Eastern Mennonite Seminary. The service was at Community Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va.

## Letters

I was planning on letting my subscription expire. In an effort to simplify my lifestyle, I've been cutting back on mail I don't really need. But as I read through [the issue on "Women Doing Theology: Individual Voices in Chorus"] so many little understandings came to me. I realized that no other magazine I receive so clearly articulates over and over again my experience as a strong, independent person of Mennonite background who happens to be a woman. This latest *Report* speaks to me once again—the me who always felt slightly guilty about being out of step with the Mennonite community and therefore being classified as a rebel (by myself as well)—one who did not/does not/cannot conform. I value relationship and have always been in pursuit of it, with God, myself and others (not always in that order), but in spite of repeated attempts, I never "belong" in Mennonite community. Imagine my excitement when I

realized that the child in me has equated "community" with God, though it's so long ago that my adult self wouldn't have known this any more. These statements helped:

- "surely God did not create humanity to fulfill an ideal of community, but rather intended community to fulfill a human need"
- "community . . . is not by nature a benevolent power"
- "community . . . is only a vehicle; it does not contain the light"
- "the implication is that community is holy and the individual fails to live up to its perfection. . . ."

Unspoken rules have so much power. To see them articulated in print, allows me to see and think about concepts previously imprinted only in wordless feeling "out there." Thanks.

—*Judi Gabai, St. Catharines, Ont.*

## Is it time to renew? Please CHECK YOUR MAILING LABEL.

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## News and verbs

Lee Synder, vice president and academic dean of Eastern Mennonite College, has been appointed the next **president of Bluffton (Ohio) College**, to begin later this year.

The Northern District Conference (GC) will host a **workshop on domestic violence and sexual abuse**, March 1-2. Scheduled speakers are Melissa Miller of Kitchener, Ont., and David Brubaker of Casa Grande, Ariz. For information call 605-925-4676.

WOMEN'S CONCERN REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committees on Women's Concerns. We believe that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committees strive to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures through which women and men can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committees on Women's Concerns.

WOMEN'S CONCERN REPORT is edited by Kristina Mast Burnett. Layout by Beth Oberholzer.

Subscription cost is \$12 U.S./\$15 Cdn. for one year or \$20 U.S./\$25 Cdn. for two years. Send all subscriptions, correspondence and address changes to Editor, MCC Women's Concerns, P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500; telephone 717-859-3889; fax 717-859-3875. Canadian subscribers may pay in Canadian currency.

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Committee**

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Justina Heese of Steinbach, Man., is associate executive secretary of **Resources Commission**, Conference of Mennonites in Canada.

Rose Mary Stutzman is new **editor of children's materials**, Mennonite Publishing House, Scottdale, Pa.

Goshen College announces a **tenure-track opening in English**. Applications by February 15. Contact John D. Nyce, academic dean; phone 219-535-7503; fax 219-535-7660.

The MCC U.S. Peace Education program has compiled a list of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ **military veterans** who are available to conferences and congregations for peace education. Women veterans who are willing to share their stories and faith journeys toward peace are invited to send their names and addresses to Titus Peachey, Peace and Justice Ministries, Box 500, Akron, PA 17501.

*We welcome your submissions to "News and verbs." This column features a wide variety of news about the interests and activities of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women. We welcome news about groups and individuals.*

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